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ABSTRACT

Results from comparable studies on the experimental arousal of achievement motivation with female subjects are often inconsistent and contradictory with the findings for males. The sex-role identity, sex-role attitudes, and experimental arousal of achievement motivation were investigated for 190 female undergraduate subjects. Experimental and control groups completed a pretest Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) need achievement measure, the Bem Sex Role Inventory, and the Attitudes Toward Women Scale. Subjects received the experimental treatments and posttest TAT a week later. Women with high masculinity displayed greater need achievement in the social arousal condition: women with low masculinity displayed greater need achievement in the intellectual arousal condition. Femininity was positively related to achievement motivation, regardless of condition. Sex-role attitudes were unrelated to need achievement scores. (Author/NRB)

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Sex-Role Identity, Sex-Role Attitudes, and Women's Achievement Motivation

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Sex-Role Identity, Sex-Role Attitudes, and Women's Achievement Motivation

Psychologists have long been interested in the study of achievement motivation, defined after McClelland (1955) as a relatively stable general disposition to strive for success in situations where standards of excellence may be applied. However, the initial breakthrough in measuring individual differences in achievement motivation began with David McClelland and his coworkers who adapted Murray's (1938) TAT technique and combined the system with experimental methods of achievement arousal for manipulating and controlling the strength of motivation. Publication of the results of studies conducted by McClelland's group in The Achievement Motive (1953) triggered a series of theoretical and empirical investigations into the dynamics of achievement-oriented behavior. Data related to achievement motivation in women have been relatively scarce in the major works of the field (i.e., Atkinson, 1958; Atkinson & Feather, 1966; Heckhausen, 1967; McClelland, 1961; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953), yet the need for such research has become increasingly apparent.

The handful of comparable studies on experimental arousal of achievement motivation with female subjects that do exist are often inconsistent with the findings for males and contradict each other. Various investigations (Field, 1951; Veroff, Wilcox, & Atkinson, 1953) have demonstrated the general failure of standard achievement arousal conditions, consisting of special instructions and additional intellectual achievement cues, in eliciting the expected increase in need for Achievement of women as had been obtained with males.

Furthermore, both neutral and achievement-oriented instructional sets have been able to elicit equally high achievement motivation scores in female research participants (Alper & Greenberger, 1967; Veroff, et al., 1953). Field (1951) found that achievement motivation of females but not males could be increased by cues arousing concern over social acceptability.

In contrast, other results indicate that females, especially those who are achieving or career-oriented and who value intellectual attainment, do display achievement motivation patterns similar to that of males under experimental conditions of achievement arousal (Angelini, 1959; French & Lesser, 1964; Hayashi & Habu, 1962; Heckhausen, 1967; Lesser, Krawitz, & Packard, 1963; Lipinski, 1965). These findings suggest that the standard arousal method emphasizing intellectual ability is not differentially valid for the two sexes.

To further complicate matters, the subject populations and methods of data collection employed in achievement research on women are frequently dissimilar from one study to another. In addition, the sex of stimulus cues (e.g., thematic pictures) used to evoke need Achievement appears to affect achievement motivation scores of women, although the nature of this relationship is still unclear (Alper, 1957; Dunbar, 1960; French & Lesser, 1964; Lesser, et al., 1963; Lipinski, 1965; Morrison, 1954; Veroff, et al., 1953).

The present study sought to examine the relation between sex-role identity and sex-role attitudes and the experimental arousal of achievement motivation in women. Specifically, the possible differential effects of two types of experimental arousal, one stressing intellectual achievement

and the other social achievement, upon the degree of achievement motivation elicited in white, middle-class college women was explored. Also investigated was the influence of the sex of stimulus cues, i.e., the gender of the main character depicted in thematic pictures, on females' responses to achievement arousal.

It was expected that individuals would display higher need Achievement under achievement-oriented conditions than under neutral conditions, if the arousal conditions stressed achievement areas consistent with perceptions of their own sex role. Since males have been found to consistently respond to experimental arousal emphasizing intelligence and leadership potential with an increase in their achievement motivation scores, it was hypothesized that the more masculine the woman's sex-role identity, the greater the increase in her need Achievement after being exposed to an Intellectual-Achievement arousal condition. Following from Stein & Bailey's (1973) proposition that achievement strivings of women tend to be expressed in role-appropriate areas such as social skills, it was predicted that the more feminine the woman's sex-role identity, the greater the increase in her need Achievement after being presented with a Social-Achievement arousal condition.

Similarly, it was hypothesized that the less traditional a woman's sex-role attitudes. the greater her need Achievement after Intellectual-Achievement arousal; the more traditional a woman's sex-role attitudes, the greater the increase expected in her achievement motivation after Social-Achievement arousal.

METHOD

Research Participants

The sample consisted of 180 white female undergraduates enrolled during the fall semester of 1976 at Douglass College in New Jersey, a public women's college within the Rutgers University system. All subjects were unpaid volunteers, most of whom had been contacted by mail through a letter sent to the entire student body, and consisted of 27.2% freshmen, 34.4% sophomores, 18.9% juniors, and 19.4% seniors, with a mean age of 19 years.

Design Procedures

Participants were divided into three major groups. Sixty subjects were randomly assigned to the Control condition, another 60 to the Intellectual-Achievement arousal condition, and the remaining 60 were assigned to the Social-Achievement arousal condition. After being assigned to the experimental conditions, 30 members of each group were randomly assigned to receive female stimulus cues while the other 30 received male cues. A pretest TAT measure of need Achievement was given to all groups. One week later, research participants were presented with the experimental treatments (Control, Intellectual-Achievement arousal, or Social-Achievement arousal) and were then administered a posttest TAT measure of need Achievement. The same female experimenter administered all pretest and posttest measures.

Pretest. The pretest was given under Neutral conditions as described by McClelland, et al. (1953, pp. 101-102). One-half of each group (i.e., 30) responded to male pictures, and the other half to female pictures, presented in counterbalanced order. The sex-role questionnaires were administered by another female experimenter upon completion of the pretest. Separate measures

of masculinity and of femininity (Bem Sex Role Inventory, 1974) were employed to assess sex-role identity and an additional measure (Attitudes toward Women Scale, 1973) assessed sex-role attitudes.

Experimental Treatments. One week later, subjects were exposed to their respective experimental treatments provided by a third female experimenter and afterwards received the posttest. In the Control condition, similar to the neutral Pretest condition, no experimental manipulation was made either to arouse or minimize achievement cues. Control subjects did not perform any task prior to the presentation of thematic pictures about which they had to write stories. In the Intellectual-Achievement arousal condition, which was similar to the Achievement-oriented condition of McClelland, et al. (1953, pp. 102-104), additional achievement cues in the form of special instructions and an anagrams task, i.e., "Generation," were introduced to evoke achievement-related motives by means of appealing to the individual's intelligence and leadership capability. Likewise, in the Social-Achievement arousal condition special instructions and a social skills task, i.e., Chapin Social Insight Test (1968), were introduced to arouse the individual's achievement-related needs by appealing to her social skills ability and not to her social acceptability or affiliative needs as had been the case in previous studies. A debriefing followed each of the final testing sessions.

RESULTS

Multiple regression analyses were performed in which the pretest need Achievement measure was covaried out of the posttest TAT need Achievement measure (the dependent variable) to determine how much of the variance in the

posttest was due to the independent variables (experimental treatments, BSRI Masculinity, BSRI Femininity, AWS, sex of cues) over and above that due to the covariate or pretest. The experimental conditions accounted for 47% of the variance over the 26% accounted for by the pretest. Post hoc comparison of the combined adjusted means of the Intellectual- and Social-Achievement arousal conditions with the adjusted mean of the Control condition revealed a significant overall increment in women's achievement motivation scores under arousal, ($F_{2,176}=6.03$; $F_{2,176;.05}=3.05$). However, regression analyses did not support the hypotheses that those women with more masculine sex-role identities or more nontraditional sex-role attitudes would show greater n Ach after Intellectual-Achievement arousal and that women with more feminine sex-role identities or more traditional sex-role attitudes would show greater need achievement after Social-Achievement arousal.

Contrary to the original hypothesis, women with demonstrated high masculinity on the BSRI had significantly higher adjusted posttest scores under Social-Achievement arousal, whereas women with low masculinity on the BSRI have significantly higher need Achievement under Intellectual-Achievement arousal conditions, ($F_{2,173} = 6.22$; $F_{2.173;.05} = 3.05$). The proportion of variance accounted for was 2%. Furthermore, a positive relation was found between the BSRI Feminity Scale and the adjusted need Achievement posttest, such that the higher a woman's BSRIF score, the higher her adjusted posttest score, ($F_{1,175} = 4.72$; $F_{1,175;.05} = 3.90$). Again, the proportion of variance accounted for was low, only 1%. Sex-role attitudes as measured by the AWS were not related to changes in women's achievement motivation after experimental achievement arousal, ($F_{1,175} < 1$; $F_{1,175;.05} = 3.90$).

Regression analysis of covariance yielded significant interaction effects between the experimental treatment and sex of stimulus cues, ($F_{2,173}$ = 3.72; $F_{2,173;.05}$ = 3.05), which accounted for 1% of the variance. Post hoc comparison on the adjusted posttest means indicated that women responded with significantly higher need Achievement to male pictures than to female under Intellectual-Achievement arousal, (t_{86} = 2.05; $t_{86;.05}$ = 1.66).

CONCLUSIONS

College women in general showed an impressive increase in their need Achievement scores in response to both Intellectual- and Social-Achievement arousal, unlike past studies in which women either failed to display a raise in need Achievement or responded differentially to intellectually- and socially-oriented arousal. However, the data did not lend support to the specific hypotheses that women would respond with greater achievement imagery to experimental arousal conditions consistent with their sex-role identity and sex-role attitudes, as would be expected from theory. Furthermore, sex-role variables accounted for a minimal proportion of variance in the adjusted posttest scores and thus, have little impact on achievement motivation in women at the present time. A plausible reason for this discrepancy with previous research is that utilization of the multiple regression approach brought to light the methodological deficiencies of other designs which may have overemphasized the potential effects of sex-role variables on the achievement motive in women.

The fact that women with high masculinity demonstrated a greater increase in need Achievement after exposure to Social-Achievement arousal, rather than

to Intellectual-Achievement arousal, suggests that even women who have developed the less "acceptable" dimension of their personality still appear to channel their drives for assertiveness and independence into socially acceptable areas. It is not surprising that women low in masculinity, who therefore encounter less role conflict, express their aroused achievement motivation in the intellectual area with minimum personal stress.

The finding that femininity was positively associated with a general increment in adjusted posttest scores is quite interesting. It further modifies Stein & Bailey's (1973) position that femininity of sex-role identity tends to restrict the expression of women's achievement strivings to areas consistent with societal definitions of the female role. Rather than being counter to achievement motivation, femininity has been shown to be supportive of a woman's ability to respond to achievement arousal conditions. Thus, while masculinity affects the direction in which females express their achievement goals, femininity affects whether they will respond to achievement-oriented conditions. A high degree of both masculinity and and femininity, along with a lessened concern for role-appropriateness of behavior, seem to be needed for the fullest expression of women's desires for successful achievement.

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